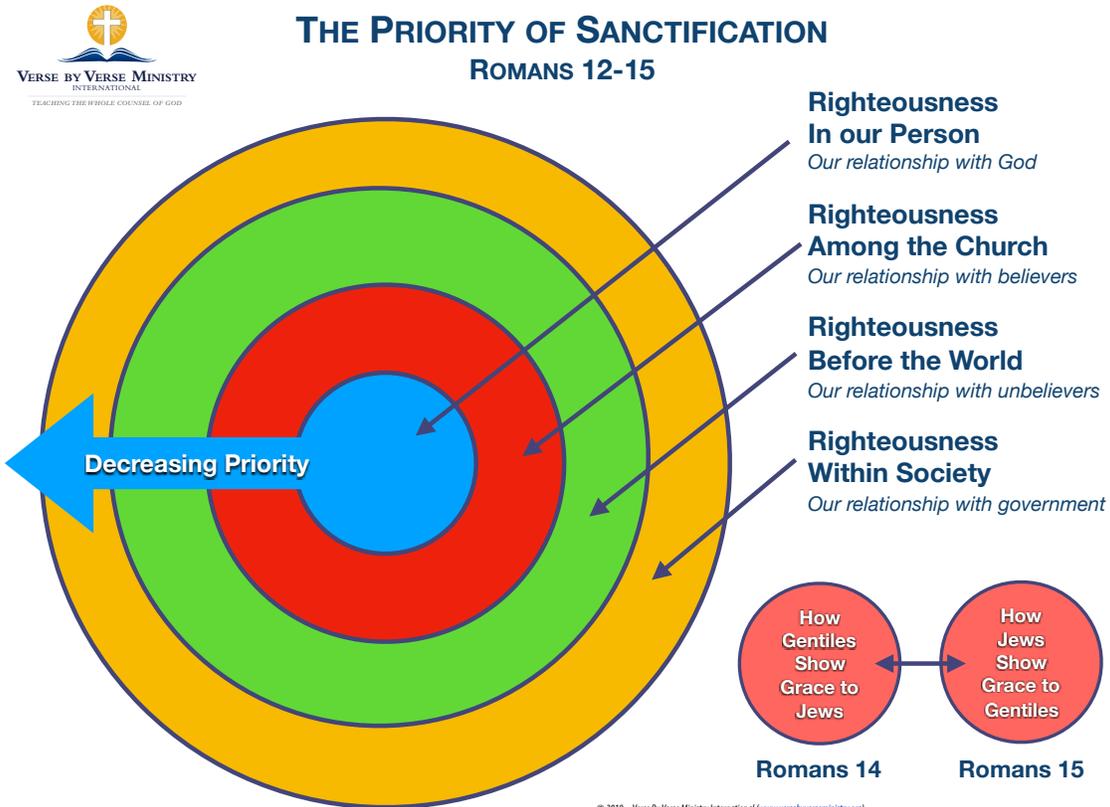


## Romans 14 (2017)

- We've completed Paul's instruction on sanctification in Chapters 12-13, so now we're ready to tackle two final issues on the question of living out our salvation
  - These two issues stand apart in that they do not follow Paul's structure represented by the bull's-eye chart



- Up to now Paul's been teaching about how to live out our salvation according to a certain priority
- He started with our highest priority, our relationship with God
- Then he moved to our relationship with the church, then to unbelievers and then to societal institutions
- Each of these relationships, represented by a ring on a bull's-eye, holds opportunity for us to practice holiness and further the Church's mission

- Each ring of the bull's-eye required we place the needs of Christ above our own
- And our success in each ring depended on having made progress in the prior ring
- So in that way Paul's system becomes a roadmap for our efforts to live out the salvation we have received by grace
- But Paul isn't finished exhorting, because there were some other issues troubling the early church that deserved special attention
  - These issues are covered in Chapter 14 and the first half of Chapter 15
  - They deal with the relationship between Jewish believers and Gentile believers
  - And the uniqueness of these circumstances requires a few minutes of introduction
- The formation of the church during the first century involved a grand social experiment
  - Never before had Jews and Gentiles tried to associate so closely together
    - The amalgamation of these two groups into one body brought significant challenges
    - We get a sense of how great these challenges were when we read about the experiences of the apostles
  - In particular, the Apostle Peter struggled with the introduction of Gentiles into the body
    - At one point his struggles even threatened to divide the body of Christ
    - It required another apostle, Paul, chastising Peter publicly for his failure to embrace God's call to the Gentiles to advance the unity of the church
  - Paul relates that moment to us in Galatians:

**Gal. 2:11** But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned.

[Gal. 2:12](#) For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he began to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision.

[Gal. 2:13](#) The rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy.

[Gal. 2:14](#) But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in the presence of all, "If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how is it that you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?"

- After Peter fled persecution in Jerusalem, he set up residence in the fast-growing church community in Antioch, Syria
  - Paul and Barnabas were already there leading the church in Antioch, and by their influence the church had attracted many Gentile believers
    - In fact, Antioch was the first church located outside Judea
    - As such, it was the first church to attempt a large-scale integration of Jews and Gentiles into the same community
    - Never before in history had something like this been attempted
  - Unsurprisingly, this integration didn't go smoothly, not at first
    - The difficulties were so significant that eventually it prompted a grand meeting of apostles in Jerusalem to settle the disputes
    - Paul and Barnabas traveled to the meeting to represent the Antioch church
    - At that counsel all the apostles agreed that Gentiles were called into the faith and must be treated as co-equals with Jews
    - Most importantly, they agreed that apart from a few specific concessions Gentiles should not adopt Jewish practices and law
  - Nevertheless, Peter continued to struggle with living around Gentiles
    - So when Peter later joined the church in Antioch, he acted contrary to the agreement the apostles made in Jerusalem
    - Specifically, Peter hypocritically returned to distancing himself from Gentile believers

- When Jews from the Jerusalem church visited Antioch, Peter refused to eat at the tables of Gentiles
- At that point, Paul chastised Peter for his hypocrisy
- Clearly if the apostle Peter struggled to accept Gentile believers, we can be sure many other Jewish believers had the same trouble
  - And as hard as it was for Jews to accept Gentiles, the opposite was also true
    - Gentile believers were equally put off by the oddities of Jewish culture
    - Jews were raised to observe strict dietary restrictions and to practice unique rituals of daily life
  - When a Jew came to faith in Christ, he or she was suddenly free from these restrictions and could live in new and unfamiliar ways
    - Nevertheless, many Jews found it extremely difficult to abandon their Jewish heritage and lifestyle practices
    - So many first century Jewish believers continued in their Jewish traditions
    - The letter of Hebrews was written to stop the most extreme of these behaviors among Jewish believers
  - But these practices were both unfamiliar and unappealing to Gentile believers
    - Jewish zealotry made Gentiles uncomfortable, especially if combined with self-righteousness or haughtiness
    - So Gentile believers resisted integrating with Jewish believers who maintained their Jewish traditions
  - A key sticking point for unity in the body was Jewish insistence of never sharing a meal with a Gentile
    - The requirement stemmed from Jewish dietary restrictions
    - Since a Jew could not eat many things that Gentiles commonly ate, Jews avoided Gentile tables
    - This quickly turned into a prohibition against entering a Gentile house or association with Gentiles whatsoever

- This was the same rule Peter was following hypocritically in Antioch
- Obviously, nothing destroys unity in a community faster than refusing to eat together
  - This is human nature
  - Even among young children in school, who you eat with during lunch indicates which community has accepted you
  - So for Jews and Gentiles in the early church, a failure to eat together struck at the heart of unity in the body
  - Secondly, Jewish observance of Sabbath and feasts and other elements of the law drove the wedge even deeper
- This is not a great recipe for unity in the body, which is why Paul set out to address these issues in this letter
  - But at this point, we need to ask if these chapters are still relevant to our church today?
    - First, there are some places where this problem still exists
    - For example, the church in present-day Israel still deals with some of these concerns
    - For these settings, Romans 14-15 are immediately applicable
  - And in other places it's becoming more common to find "messianic" congregations assembling
    - These are (ostensibly) Christian gatherings that have adopted a distinctively Jewish style of worship to appeal to Jewish believers
    - But these groups also attract Gentile believers who are attracted to understanding the Jewish roots of our faith
    - In these settings, you find the potential for the same conflict Paul was addressing in the early church
  - And finally, for the rest of the church, Paul's teaching remains relevant when considered in a more general way
    - Even if we aren't dealing with differences between Jew and Gentile, we still contend with other differences

- Racial differences, nationality differences, cultural differences...
  - Believers with different conviction, different levels of spiritual maturity, different interpretations of scripture...
- These differences can lead to similar divisions and difficulties and therefore they can be resolved by applying the principles found in these chapters
- So let's turn to Chapter 14, and as we observe Paul's instruction we'll consider its application for the early church and for our situation today

**Rom. 14:1** Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions.

**Rom. 14:2** One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only.

**Rom. 14:3** The one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him.

**Rom. 14:4** Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

- Chapter 14 opens with Paul calling for one group within the body to accept (or receive) another group
  - As we'll see from the context of Paul's instructions, the first group are Gentile believers, while the second group are Jewish believers
    - Paul is asking Gentiles in the church to accept or receive Jewish believers into fellowship
    - He wants Gentiles to show Jews love despite their odd and potentially divisive cultural differences
    - He'll ask the same thing in reverse in Chapter 15
    - But for now we're looking at Gentiles accepting the strange, restrictive practices of Jewish believers
  - Paul refers to the Jewish believers as those "weak" in faith
    - To be weak in this context is not pejorative

- Paul is speaking in spiritual terms, in the sense of spiritual strength or maturity
- In physical terms, it would be similar to referring to a 3-year old toddler as “weak” in comparison to a teenager
  - When we call a toddler weak compared to a teenager, we’re not insulting the toddler...
  - We’re simply describing the obvious differences between the two
  - A teenager has grown and matured enough to lift heavy objects, while a toddler is not yet capable of doing the same
  - So naturally, we don’t expect the same things of the toddler that we might of a teenager
- Paul is asking the church to be similarly understanding for those who are weak spiritually
  - Paul describes Jewish believers as weak in faith in the sense that they felt a need to continue observing aspects of the Law
    - By grace, Jewish believers were as free from the Mosaic Law as Gentile believers were
    - Yet many Jews found this transition too big of a leap to make right away
    - They felt uneasy abandoning their previous convictions so abruptly
    - So they tended to maintain Jewish dietary restrictions for a time, if not forever
  - This was a sign of weakness in faith, in the sense that it meant they were not strong enough spiritually to take advantage of the liberty they had in Christ
    - They felt more comfortable in the old ways even as they walked in the grace of the New Covenant
    - Their conscience was still growing in its appreciation of liberty
    - And in the meantime they relied on the familiarity and safety of what they understood in the law

- Of course, Gentile believers had no trouble embracing the liberty they enjoyed in the New Covenant
  - Gentiles had never been under the Law, so the Law held no attraction for them, especially in light of grace
  - For that same reason, they looked down on those Jewish believers who could not set the law aside
  - Some probably mocked or rejected these weaker believers
  - Or even worse, the Gentile believers might've forced the issue by pressuring Jewish believers to go against their conscience
- Paul says that the loving way for Gentiles to accommodate Jewish believers was to accept them into the body unconditionally
  - Welcome them despite their continuing observance of dietary laws
    - And importantly, Paul adds in v.1 that Gentiles weren't to accept Jews merely for the purpose of passing judgment
    - To accept someone for the purpose of passing judgment means to bring them in under false pretense
    - We act as if we receive them, when in reality we won't truly accept them unless and until they conform to our desires
    - That's not true acceptance and it's certainly not loving
  - Nevertheless, Paul acknowledges that Jewish dependence on the Law was not desirable
    - He was calling for acceptance of Jews – but only for the purpose of unity – not for the purpose of adopting their theology
    - Paul was not endorsing a believer's need to observe Jewish dietary restrictions
    - Dietary restrictions came about as part of a Law God gave to Israel to serve as a temporary custodian
    - It served to separate Israel from the rest of the nations, maintaining their uniqueness and identity
  - In Galatians Paul expresses it this way:

[Gal. 3:19](#) Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made.

[Gal. 3:23](#) But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed.

[Gal. 3:24](#) Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith.

- God added to Israel the Law to help address mankind's sins
  - It was ordained "until" the Messiah (seed) would come
  - The word until makes clear that the Law was intended to be a temporary accommodation
  - Paul calls the Law a custodian, a tutor, like a babysitter keeping God's people safe until the parent came to claim the child
- So any Jewish believer who understood this truth possessed spiritual strength in comparison to other Jewish believers who didn't
  - The strength of their faith was evidenced in their willingness to set aside dietary restrictions that no longer applied
    - Those stronger Jewish Christians were willing to eat anything freely
    - But those who were weak in regard to these truths will eat vegetables only
    - Of course, Gentiles never had such restrictions, so it was easy for them to look down on any "weak" Jew, but Paul says that was wrong
  - Interestingly, the Mosaic Law didn't require Jews to eat only vegetables
    - So why did this become the practice for those Jews who were weak in faith?
    - Most likely, the Jewish believers living around Gentiles were eating vegetables only to avoid eating anything unclean
  - There are no unclean vegetables in the Mosaic Law

- Fresh fruits, vegetables and grains are, in their natural unprocessed state, kosher
- But if vegetables are combined with dairy or meat (or cooked in pots that have also been used to cook dairy and meat), then they take on the properties of these other foods
- So the fact that Jews felt they could only eat vegetables tells us something about the weakness of their faith
  - But it also suggests Gentile believers were showing no consideration for their Jewish brothers and sisters
  - They gave no thought to how pots and dishes were used in the preparation of food for the gathering
  - They may have prepared pork or shellfish or other unclean foods and thought nothing of how it would offend their Jewish brothers and sisters
  - And therefore, Jewish believers probably felt they had no choice but to resort to vegetarianism to avoid eating unclean food
- So ironically, who had the weaker faith? The Jews who couldn't abandon the Law or the Gentiles who couldn't show consideration for their weak neighbors?
  - Both issues needed to be addressed to promote unity in the body
    - And together, they form two key principles that still apply today
  - First we find the principle that we must endeavor to grow in our appreciation of relationships with Christ
    - It's important to avoid unduly burdening others in the body with our spiritual weaknesses
    - Everyone has weakness and the body is here to help us
    - But that places us under obligation to avail ourselves of that support so we may grow out of that dependence
  - Secondly, we must be prepared to accept weaker members of the body without passing judgment
    - We expect them to grow in maturity in time
    - But in the meantime, we give them grace and patience

- Because in order for spiritual growth to happen, they first must be part of the body where they can be trained and encouraged
- Which is why in v.3 Paul says the one with faith to eat cannot show contempt for those who lacked the faith to eat all things
  - Likewise, those who observed dietary restrictions were not to judge those who ate freely
  - Instead, each group must recognize that God has accepted the other already on the basis of Christ's sacrifice
- Our faith in Jesus Christ puts to rest these differences because Christ triumphed in all things on our behalf
  - For the Jew, Christ kept the Old Covenant Law perfectly so that His perfection could be credited to the Jew's account by faith
  - And for the Gentile, Christ fulfills the Abrahamic Covenant promised to bless all nations of people, bringing us righteousness apart from the Law
  - For both groups Christ has paid the penalty for all sin so that neither group finds its righteousness in works, whether eating or not eating
- Consequently, Paul asks in v.4 how can we rightly judge the servant of another master?
  - By faith, both groups have become bondslaves of Christ and serve Him according to His commands
    - Since we cannot know how the Lord is commanding each of His servants, how can we judge whether anyone else is doing the right thing?
    - Apart from things specifically commanded in scripture, we should give each believer latitude to obey Christ as they feel convicted
  - Paul reminds us that each of us will stand or fall at our judgment based on how we responded to Christ individually
    - We won't be judged based on what someone else thought we should do to please Christ
    - Paul says that Christ is able to make each believer "stand"

- Christ knows what's best for each of His servants
- So if we pay attention to His direction, we will receive a good judgment
- But if we give attention to another's opinions rather than Christ's direction, we will not stand...we will fall
- This is the danger of liberalism in the Church
  - Liberalism is taking liberty too far, ignoring our convictions so we may go with the crowd
    - Liberalism results from combining the liberty of everyone to arrive at a superset of privileges
    - We abandon our convictions anytime we discover another believer who does not share that conviction
    - Such thinking assumes that if it's good for one believer, it's good for all believers
  - In reality, liberalism is an abuse of liberty
    - Everyone has a limited range of liberty that Christ has determined is best for them individually
    - Some will drink alcohol or smoke or play the lottery, and some will not
    - Some give 10% of their money to church, some will give more, some will give less
  - But each of us must pay attention to our personal convictions and allow the Spirit to guide these choices
    - Those who feel greater liberty must not impose that freedom on others thinking we know better about what they need
    - If we press other believers to explore more freedom than they otherwise feel comfortable experiencing, we cause them to sin
  - And if we're successful in convincing another Christian to go against their convictions in the name of liberty, we're making a huge mistake
    - We're wounding their conscience, as Paul explains next:

[Rom. 14:5](#) One person regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind.

[Rom. 14:6](#) He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God.

[Rom. 14:7](#) For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself;

[Rom. 14:8](#) for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.

[Rom. 14:9](#) For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.

- Paul shifts his example from dietary restrictions to the Sabbath day observance, but his underlying concern remains the same
  - Paul says one person (the observant Jew) regards one day above another
    - That one day, of course, is the Jewish Sabbath
    - Jews under the Law observed a Sabbath from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday
    - Sabbath was the high day of the week, and it came with a long list of restrictions and observances
    - Obviously, Gentiles had no such observance – Christians in general are not under such restrictions now
  - Then in the second half of v.5 Paul says another believer may regard every day alike
    - That refers to not observing a Sabbath day at all, regardless of the day of the week
    - Notice Paul doesn't condemn or correct such a person...he simply lists this option as equally valid with observing a Sabbath
    - He then adds that whichever way we choose to go, we must be fully convinced in our own mind, referring to our conscience
  - Clearly Paul (and therefore Scripture) has no problem with Christians forgoing a Sabbath observance, whether a Jewish Christian or Gentile
    - As Scripture teaches repeatedly, we are not under Law

- Therefore there is no requirement for believers to hold one day above the rest
- But by that same token, a believer may hold one day above the rest should he choose to do so
- Again, Christians who grow in faith would be expected to abandon such observances as they mature
  - Nevertheless, in the meantime we must accept those who depend upon such an observance
  - The point is that each believer be permitted to follow his or her own conscience on these matters
  - So long as they feel convicted, let them live accordingly
- In v.6 Paul reminds us that when we act according to our convictions, whether on matters of food or days of the week or whatever, we are serving Christ in our heart
  - This is the essence of obedience: doing what we feel convicted to do
    - And the corollary is generally also true: sin is acting contrary to our convictions
    - So Paul says of the one who observes a Sabbath in full conviction, that they are doing well
    - And the one who doesn't observe a Sabbath day (also as a matter of conviction) is doing equally well
    - Because both are seeking to obey Christ
  - While the Spirit will never lead us contrary to Scripture, He may ask us to forgo our liberty at times for our own good
    - There is nothing sinful when a Christian assumes a more restrictive lifestyle out of personal conviction
    - For example, Christians are not required to observe a Sabbath but that doesn't necessarily mean it's wrong if a believer chooses to observe one
    - A Jewish believer could feel conviction to continue observing a Sabbath either because he hadn't been taught otherwise or he didn't feel comfortable abandoning the practice...

- But if we ask such a person to go against his conscience, we're asking that Christian to sin
  - We're eroding their confidence in their convictions
  - We're training them to ignore their internal spiritual compass, which is a dangerous precedent
  - For example, if a Christian is convinced that Christ expects him to observe a Sabbath – even though Scripture doesn't require it – then he must act as his conscience directs
  - To act contrary to what he believes Christ wants is an intent to sin, even when it's not actually sin
- If we convince this Christian that is the best course, we give them cause to doubt all their convictions...this is nothing if not unloving
  - After all, our goal shouldn't be getting people to agree with our viewpoint on any matter of liberty
    - Our goal should be in helping all believers become more obedient to Christ
    - In vs.7-9 Paul says no Christian lives for himself or dies for himself, but we exist to serve (that is, to obey) Christ
  - To live or die is Paul's way of referring to the two periods of a believer's existence spent serving Christ
    - To live refers to the time we serve Christ with our earthly life now
    - While to die refers to our passing from this life into our eternal existence, where we will continue to serve Christ forever in glory
    - So regardless of whether we're living here or in eternity, we are suppose to serve Christ, not ourselves
  - So we need to leave other believers to serve Christ as He has called them to do so without our interference
    - Don't try to make other believers serve your convictions
    - Or serve the pastor's personal agenda
    - Or serve the church's programs and priorities

- Paul's not talking about correcting another believer engaged in sin...we're talking about matters of liberty
- The general principle underlying Paul's teaching is don't make yourself another Christian's Holy Spirit
  - We cannot assign our convictions to another
  - Whatever the Lord has placed on our heart concerning liberty and various practices of the faith is for us alone
  - Barring specific scripture to contrary, anything another believer does by faith and conviction is proper and must be respected
- And especially in cases where another believer's convictions fall short of enjoying all the liberty they have available in Christ, be careful
  - Don't insist that their convictions are wrong...they're not
  - Instead, patiently instruct the believer in scripture so that over time they will grow strong enough to enjoy liberty
- For example, if a believer feels a conviction to abstain from pork, we should respect that conviction though we know it to be unnecessary
  - We accommodate them in love by avoiding serving pork around them
    - And we say nothing to make them feel unwelcome or disrespected for their convictions
    - We don't flaunt our liberty by pulling out a ham sandwich in front of them
    - And we certainly don't try to fix their "problem" by pressuring them to abandon their convictions
  - Instead, we accept their convictions, seeking to maintain fellowship without judgment
    - Then we patiently instruct them from scripture
    - We don't necessarily seek out teaching specifically on the issue of pork, again trying to force the issue
    - We simply teach the whole counsel of God's word, trusting that the Lord will grow their appreciation of Christ and grace

- As the person grows in the grace and knowledge of their Lord, Jesus Christ, they will begin to mature
  - And in that spiritual growth they will eventually find their convictions changing to better align with scripture
  - So in other words, we don't teach believers to ignore their convictions
  - We teach believers the Bible so that the Holy Spirit may change their convictions
- In v.9 Paul says that's why Christ died and rose again, so that He could be Lord over those who are being saved and over a people for all eternity
  - His death means even now, as we live in a sinful body, our service to Christ in faith is acceptable to God
    - We don't have to wait to reach eternity to serve Christ
    - And we do that now by obeying the convictions he puts on our heart
    - And our service won't stop when we die...it lives on eternally because we have eternal life made possible by Christ as well
  - But human nature, especially in tight knit groups, is to expect conformity
    - To an extent, conformity in the body of Christ is a necessary and healthy expectation
    - But in cases of spiritual maturity, it's a dangerous expectation
- When more mature believers expect less mature, "weaker" believers to act as they do, we're promoting liberalism and hurting our brother or sister
  - Paul raises that concern next

**Rom. 14:10** But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God.

**Rom. 14:11** For it is written,

"As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me,  
And every tongue shall give praise to God."

**Rom. 14:12** So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God.

- If we demand conformity to our standards, we're judging a brother
- Too often we hear people throw around the statement "don't judge me", claiming that the Bible prohibits judging one another
- That's true in certain contexts and very untrue in others
- In matters of sin and righteousness, the body of Christ is absolutely called to judge one another
  - Paul says it plainly that we are to judge members of the body in matters of right and wrong to ensure good behavior

**1Cor. 5:12** For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church?

**1Cor. 5:13** But those who are outside, God judges. Remove the wicked man from among yourselves.

- We are to remove the wicked from among ourselves
- And this will require judging sin where it exists in the body
- On the other hand, we are never to judge another believer on matters of personal liberty
  - Paul says this here in Romans and elsewhere

**Col. 2:16** Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day –

**Col. 2:17** things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.

- No one may judge us on things of liberty like food, drink, Sabbath day observance, etc.

**1Cor. 10:28** But if anyone says to you, "This is meat sacrificed to idols," do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you, and for conscience' sake;

**1Cor. 10:29** I mean not your own conscience, but the other man's; for why is my freedom judged by another's conscience?

- Furthermore, Paul says that no man may judge him in matters of personal conscience
- The same is true for every believer

- So a believer's choices and decisions may be judged when these choices are a violation of scripture and constitute sin
  - But when the matter involves personal liberty, no one may be our judge
  - Christ alone judges us for our convictions, because Christ alone sets those convictions
  - And He alone will judge us for whether we obeyed them
- Can you think of times when you acted contrary to your convictions yet you weren't sinning necessarily?
  - You still felt some guilt, didn't you?
    - You still regretted your decision, even though others around you were doing the same thing
    - That's a moment when you sinned against your own conscience
  - We don't want to encourage other believers to act in that way
    - Not only will their judgment before Christ be impacted...but so will your judgment!
    - Paul says at the end of v.10 that we all stand before the judgment seat of Christ
  - This moment is an evaluation for reward, not for the assignment of punishment
    - We all will face this moment with some regrets
    - But the grace of God is greater than our sin, so in forgiveness and mercy we will receive a reward
  - But we don't want to send others – much less ourselves – into that moment with any more baggage than necessary
    - Ironically, we might think we're doing someone a favor by convincing them to enjoy a pork chop when they resist
    - But in reality, we're hurting their future judgment because we're leading them to sin
    - And we're hurting our own judgment too, because we're sinning in convincing them to go against their convictions